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USEU BRUSSELS  
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SUBJECT: DISASTER ALERT: NAMIBIA-SEVERE FLOODING IN NORTHERN AND  
NORTH EASTERN REGIONS

1. Torrential rains in Angola and northern Namibia in January and February 2009 have caused serious flooding in the north and north east of Namibia. Thousands of people have already been affected and every day the situation is getting worse. The floods in the northern regions have already claimed six lives. Many families have been or are being evacuated to higher ground and tent towns are rising on college and show grounds. There has been damage to infrastructure including roads, schools, clinics, businesses and housing. Cattle have died and there has been severe damage to crops and stored grains due to flood water submersion. Homelessness, hunger, water borne disease and other infections resulting from the lack of safe drinking water and lack of sanitary waste disposal are reportedly increasing.

2. The worst affected areas are 700-900 kilometers north and northeast of Windhoek. More heavy rains in southern Angola are predicted by the hydrologists in the Namibian Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry, and another wave of floodwater is expected in the Cuvelai drainage system. Heavy rains are also now affecting the capital, Windhoek, where schools and businesses were inundated and cars swept away by flash floods during the last week. The dry southern regions are receiving more rainfall than usual and the sluices of the biggest dam have been opened to avoid a dam wall burst which would flood settlements and downstream crops under irrigation. Even the coastal areas have been affected: the town of Walvis Bay has been without water for two weeks after the sudden water flow in the Kuiseb River caused extensive damage to the bore holes and pumps that provide water to the town. In Caprivi the level of the Zambezi River is rising and floods are reported to be worsening. Many families have been relocated to higher ground settlements. The level of the Okavango River in the Kavango region is also rising fast. Reporting on the situation has been by the GRN, regional authorities, the Namibian Red Cross Society (NRCS) and other NGOs and media. Mission implementing partner staff members have also traveled to the north recently and have come back with personal observations consistent with what is being reported in national media.

3. This year's flooding is the result of an unusual weather pattern that has contributed to heavier rains than normal in northern Namibia and southern Angola. Some of the damage and displacement caused by the flooding is related to the growth and expansion of towns in the Caprivi, Ohangwena, Omusati and Oshana regions into depressions (oshonas), dry river beds and the low-lying areas of the Cuvelai delta. The January-February 2009 rains have inundated low-lying areas quickly and extensively, and water flowing down the Cuvelai delta from southern Angola is increasing the water levels.

4. Aging water management infrastructure that was damaged during the 2008 floods has not been repaired and has not been effective under the circumstances. Floods have swept away large swathes of gravel roads, especially in the Oshana and Omusati regions where they have cut off whole communities from towns and necessary services. Continued rains will burden infrastructure further and likely

aggravate flooding and hardship.

¶5. The GRN has developed a contingency plan to deal with the flooding, but only two of the thirteen regions and two sectors, Education and Health, have developed contingency plans. Line ministries and regions have no budget to address the disaster. The Directorate of the Emergency Management Unit(EMU) says that it is fairly prepared to deal with the disaster, but the reality is that it lacks the financial and technical resources to handle another flood so soon after the 2008 floods. The Namibian Red Cross Society has been keen to demonstrate its willingness and capacity to respond to affected citizens' needs. Their field workers and volunteers are currently conducting an assessment of the impact of the floods in the Caprivi, Kavango, Omusati, Oshana and Oshikoto regions.

¶6. It is difficult to obtain specific information regarding the flood situation. The EMU is receiving sporadic reports from the regions, but has not yet released an official comprehensive assessment of flood damage and rehabilitation/support needs. An EMU/NRCS team conducted a quick assessment of the northern regions on the impact of the floods and will be reporting to the Prime Minister. Two assessment teams comprised of representatives of the EMU, line ministries, the NRCS and UN agencies will be leaving for the northern regions, Caprivi, and Kavango o/a February 28 to conduct a more extensive assessment. The authorities are concerned about the infrastructure that is under water. Forty schools and some clinics have had to be closed during the last week.

¶8. Post will continue to monitor the situation and liaise with contacts in the GRN and partner organizations. If and when the GRN declares an emergency and requests assistance, OFDA can expect an appeal for disaster assistance from Embassy Windhoek under COM authority. In that appeal we will identify a partner organization (likely to be the Namibian Red Cross Society), and specific uses of the funding requested.

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